

Galería Ehrhardt Flórez

NØ BIG DEAL

Otto Zitko

From January 20th to February 24th, 2024

For this fifth exhibition by Otto Zitko at the gallery, entitled NØ BIG DEAL, a series of recent works have been selected to show the new directions his work has taken.

On the one hand, we find a set of paintings on aluminium supports –very common in his work for decades– and, on the other, a series of works on paper. The aluminium pieces are now intervened on with a type of paint and felt-tip pen, new materials that entail new techniques and which, in turn, generate new pictorial speeds, registers and displacements. These effects are fundamentally related to colour and the sliding of the line, which slips and is deposited on the surface in a different way, leaving an imprint on the support that is distinct from previous paintings.

In NØ BIG DEAL, black, blue and red once again take centre stage, yet without completely displacing chromatic ranges that are newer to his work, with yellows, maroons, violets, greens and oranges completing the selection of paintings.

Indeed, colour seems in some way to determine the composition and gesture of each painting. Both in the pieces that use only one colour and in those that alternate between different ranges, the tone of course conditions the colour, but what is deeply striking and requires more detailed analysis is the relationship between colour, gesture and composition. It is curious to observe how yellow, for example, covers more surface area than other colours and how the line accumulates in denser areas, forming compositions made up of chromatic blocks. Other colours, however, push the painter towards a much more liquid and fluid gesture. If in some paintings the forces of gesture constitute an energy towards the interior of the work, in others the gesture and the line escape outwards, proposing readings and drawings beyond the limits of the painting itself.

On previous occasions Zitko has intervened on the walls of the gallery and in other exhibitions also combined two very notable facets of his work that are also related to these limits. While making his debut in Madrid in 2002 with a mural painting that completely occupied the walls of the exhibition room, in 2015 the paintings were fragments of a larger-scale intervention that expanded beyond the aluminium plates hung on the wall and continued along the gallery walls, turning the painting into a fragment of a larger pictorial action. Now, for the exhibition NØ BIG DEAL, regardless of whether the paintings turn in on themselves or if their lines try to flee in other directions, the paintings are conceived as autonomous entities or objects, autonomous from all others.

His painting is based on premises that are as clear as they are blurred, as subjective as they are collective: art brut, surrealist-based automatic writing, the creative act as a Freudian “altered state of consciousness”. The paintings thus continue to sustain a perennial echo of pictographic impulses that run in the theoretical wake of figures such as Tristan Tzara, Paul Éluard or Hans Prinzhorn. Form in Zitko’s work must be understood as the plastic result of a mental state of impulse. There is a certain hallucinatory or delirious quality in his painting, which, eschewing preliminary sketches and any distance and time between initial idea and execution, is a true action, a direct and immediate record of a physical act.

Zitko has titled one of the paintings exhibited in NØ BIG DEAL “Self-Portrait as Gordian Knot”; and perhaps in some way the artist has been trying to solve this complex matter of untying the knot through painting over several years now. Sometimes this Gordian knot is secured impenetrably and at others only loosely. Legend has it that Gordium, as an offering, gave his chariot to the temple of Zeus, and tied it together with his spear and yoke in such a complicated knot that no one could untie it. The most famous and drastic solution was that employed by Alexander the Great in cutting the knot. Zitko, however, seems to come to a quite different conclusion: to unravel it in order to unveil the legendary enigma of painting.

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